

21 April 1976

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Situation in Lebanon

The Political Negotiations

Syria's recent show of force in Lebanon, its blockade of arms supplies to the Lebanese left, and the cooperation it is receiving from Palestinian leaders have, on balance, improved the prospects for further negotiations. The agreement between the Syrians and Palestinian chief Yasir Arafat announced late last week has left the radical Muslims, who depend heavily on Palestinian military support, no choice but to accept the accord's provisions for further Syrian mediation and a new cease-fire.

There are still several serious obstacles for the Syrians to overcome. The Christians deeply resent the fact that the Syrian-Palestinian agreement was negotiated without their participation and have given only qualified endorsement to the accord. Top Christian leaders have agreed to abide by the new cease-fire and have approved Syrian peace efforts in general, but they reject the agreement's prohibition against the involvement of Western powers or other Arab states in future settlement talks, and suspect Damascus of making secret concessions to the Palestinians.

Buoyed by recent military aid from Israel, the Christians may now insist on new guarantees that the Palestinian fedayeen abide by past agreements governing their activities in Lebanon, and more importantly, they may refuse to accept exclusive Syrian direction of further mediation. If the Christians press their point by delaying constitutional procedures providing for President Franjiyah's departure and the election of a new president, security would quickly deteriorate.

The Question of Syrian Intervention

Should the cease-fire collapse, Syrian regular forces now based in Lebanon are in a position to move quickly on

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Beirut and other areas where fighting would be heaviest. We believe President Asad will do all he can to avoid using Syrian regular forces and to keep the negotiations on track. However, he reportedly is prepared to send an additional 10,000 troops to Lebanon if the fighting intensifies or if a political solution is not found by the end of the month. Asad's determination to see his policy through at considerable risk to his domestic position and his demonstrated willingness to act without assurances of Israeli restraint increase the risk that he may take actions that could lead to a broader Middle East conflict.

#### The Israeli Position

We believe the Israelis are nearing--if they have not already reached--the limits of their tolerance of Syrian military intervention in Lebanon. Their paramount concern, of course, is for the security of Israel and they are deeply suspicious of Syria's ultimate intentions. On the other hand, top Israeli leaders recognize that Syria's recent actions are, in effect, serving their own immediate interest of restraining the Lebanese leftists and Palestinians and, more importantly, protecting the Christians.

This appreciation of Syrian policy will induce the Israelis to continue to gauge their reactions cautiously and with considerable flexibility. However, the Israelis would probably feel compelled to intervene in Lebanon if Syria introduces another large increment of armored forces or moves additional troops into the area roughly delineated by the Litani River. Any Israeli intervention in Lebanon is likely to be confined initially to southern Lebanon; the size of the intervention force and the duration and depth of its incursion would depend largely on the nature of the perceived threat from Syria.